

## Peter and His Epistles

### Lesson 7: The Denials

#### I. Introduction

- A. This most important set of events is recorded in all four gospels. Matt. 26:17-75, Mark 14:12-72, Luke 22:7-62, John 13:1-38, 18:1-27
- B. Setting: Feast of the Unleavened Bread (8 days) See Ex. 12:15-20
  - 1. Was normally eaten standing up (Ex. 12:11)
  - 2. The meal consisted of unleavened bread, wine, bitter herbs, sauce and lamb
  - 3. Was eaten within the city limits between sundown and midnight
  - 4. It was Jewish custom to lend out a room for those out of towners who needed a place to have the meal together
  - 5. There was seating arrangement

“John is close enough to lean against Jesus and whisper in his ear. Jesus would have been reclining, leaning on his left elbow. This means John is probably on his right (John 13:23). In Judaism, as in many other ancient cultures, the right hand is the place of honor. Judas, it seems, is sitting at his left. This was called ‘the place of the intimate friend.’ Jesus can dip the sop in the same dish with him (Mark 14:20). Judas is also close enough that Jesus is able to confirm his treachery privately (Matthew 26:25). Had the other disciples heard that Judas was the one, he would have never left the room alive.”

(A Fragile Stone, p. 88-89)

- C. There was extensive preparation (Luke 22:7)

Peter and John were sent out. It appears that Jesus took special pains “to cement their friendship by this expression of confidence. (See Acts 3:4, 4:13)

- D. The washing of their feet

#### II. The predictions of betrayal

- A. Judas (see Matt. 26:21)
- B. Peter
  - 1. Note that Jesus said they would all fall away (Mark. 14:27) and they all protested like Peter
  - 2. But note who Jesus prays for
  - 3. Jesus emphasized His response: “I tell you the truth (amen!), today – yes, tonight!”
  - 4. The Lord’s personal prayer and interest in Peter (Luke 22:31-32). Note: the sifting process – “a means to remove that which is impure so that which remains is pure.”
  - 5. The warning of the crowing rooster
  - 6. Peter asserts his willingness even to die with Jesus. See John 13:37 and Matt 26:33-35.

### III. In the Garden of Gethsemane (Matt. 26:36-46)

- A. The name means “oil press.” It is an enclosed piece of ground on the western slopes of Mount Olivet across the Kidron Valley from the city of Jerusalem. Jesus often frequented this garden (John 18:1-2).
- B. Eight disciples were told to sit at some distance. The inner three (Peter, James, John) were invited to keep watch with Jesus.
- C. The Agony of Christ – “a sorrow so deep it almost kills”
  - 1. “My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow” – Ps. 42-43
  - 2. He prays privately and returns three times to check on the three disciples who “can not watch and pray for even one hour.”
  - 3. Jesus addresses all three men but focuses in on Peter: “Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing but the body is weak.”
- D. The arrest
  - 1. Peter cuts off the ear lobe of the servant of the high priest (Malchus)
  - 2. Peter is confused and discouraged

“What a day! Peter had not expected to be called upon as a servant to prepare the meal. He had not expected to find Judas sitting at his high place beside Jesus at the meal. He had certainly not expected to see the Master, who only a few days earlier had been resplendent in light, kneeling before him like a common slave, washing his dirty feet. He had not expected to see the emotional breakdown he had just witnessed in the garden. Never in his wildest imagination had he expected Jesus, in a desperate moment like this, to correct him like a schoolboy. Peter had been rebuked for what he would have thought was the very proof of his faithfulness to Jesus. After all, shouldn’t his courage in the garden be something a person called the Rock should possess? But above all, never had he expected to see Jesus give up.

Peter could bear all the rest of it, but not this. Peter gives up his fight only because the things he sees Jesus giving up. Jesus, it seemed, was turning his back on all he had so passionately preached about for the last three years. What about the kingdom? Peter screamed inside himself. Seeing Jesus submit to being bound and led away broke something deep in Peter’s will.”

(A Fragile Stone, p. 103)

3. Peter is rebuked by Jesus (Matthew 26:52)

#### IV. Peter’s Denials

- A. Peter (and John) followed the mob (Matt. 26:58, John 18:15) “at a distance”
- B. John entered (he was known by the high priest), Peter had to wait at the door.
- C. The denials:

1<sup>st</sup> denial: given to the girl at the door

2<sup>nd</sup> denial: given at the fire pit

3<sup>rd</sup> denial: about an hour later, given after Peter was confronted by a relative of Malchus.

Note: in the first two denials, Peter is denying identification with Jesus. In the third instance, Peter is denying Jesus himself.

1. “Matthew and Mark in close agreement and list three denials: (1) before a servant girl, in the courtyard; (2) before another girl, but out by the gateway; (3) before bystanders, apparently in the court. Luke also lists three: (1) before a servant girl, apparently near the fire; (2) before another person, place not specified; (3) before yet another person, still in the courtyard (22:60-61). The three denials recorded by John are (1) before a servant girl at the door; then,

after a break in the narrative, (2) before some people - the verb is plural but may be generalizing one – (3) before one of the high priests servants, a relative of Malchus.”

(Expositor’s Commentary, Vol. 8, p. 557)

2. Note: the variation of the accounts seems to occur because each writer is treating the sequence of the trials differently. Matthew and Mark do not record the examination before Annas. John does not speak of the Jewish trial and Luke seems to see only one trial before the Sanhedrin.
3. The “oath” Peter made is not swearing but rather a kind of solemn curse on himself if he is lying. This is something Jesus taught them not to do (see Matt. 5:37)
4. The cock crows – a bitter reminder of Jesus’ words (Matt. 26:34). Note: Matthew does not mention Peter again.
5. Peter’s tears. “He burst into tears,” “he thought on it and wept,” “ he threw himself to the ground.” These were heavy, uncontrollable sobs, a kind of heart breaking wailing.
6. The gaze from Jesus (Luke 22:61). He “looked straight at Him” – same word as John 1:42.

## V. So what?

We have the same basic problem that Peter has...we get frustrated when God does not meet our expectations. Peter wanted (and needed) a conquering warrior to subdue his enemies. Instead, Jesus was the suffering savior. Peter was filled with disappointment and despair and he reacted wrongly. So do we!

We need to learn the same lesson perspective that Peter learned.

1 Peter 4:12-13 “Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed.”

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**Discussion Questions:**

1. Describe how you think Peter was feeling:
  - as he and John set up for the dinner
  - as Jesus prayed in the garden
  - as he followed the arresting mob
  - as he stood in the courtyard
  - as he fled into the night
2. Why do you think Jesus warned Peter that His denial was coming?
3. In light of the intense pressure of that night, what would you have done if you were confronted as Peter was? What would you have said?